THE LAST NEW WORLD that AWAITS a COLUMBUS

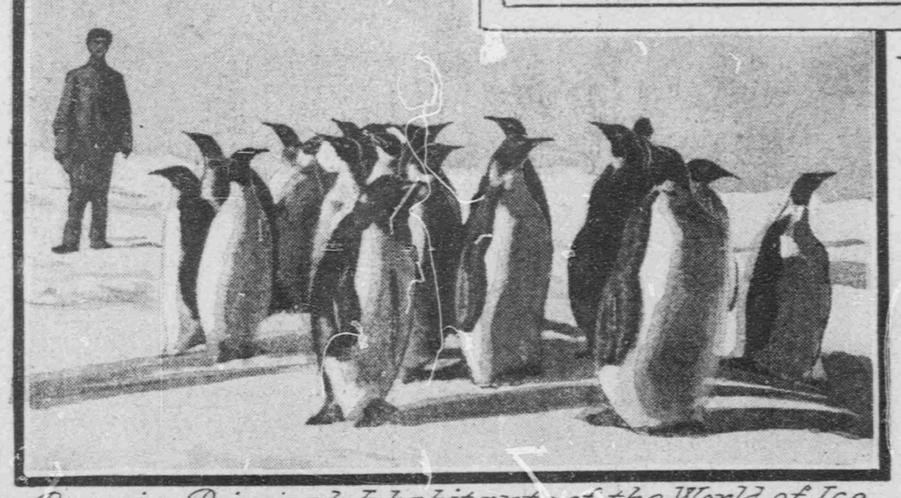
Dr. Jean B. Charcot, the French Explorer.

The Peculiar Flat Icebergs of the Antarctic.

Equipped for Antarctic Travel.

Lieut. E. H. Shackleton.

Ice Huts of Refuge



Penguins, Principal Inhabitants of the World of Ice.

Who will lift the veil of mystery from the great Antarctic ice continent?

AWAITING the coming of some latter-day Columbus is a great continent, the exact extent of which no man knows. It is the last on the globe awaiting exploration—that silent, grim, ice-covered world that holds the South Pole clutched to its frozen bosom.

Strange it is that, while so many valiant dashes have been made toward the North Pole, comparatively few explorers have set their faces resolutely toward the Southern Cross.

A kind of romantic rivalry has inspired those who have sought the North Pole; the mere glory of winning the prize has spurred them on. Yet science may be much more greatly benefited and human knowledge more vastly enriched when the secrets of the mysterious Antarctic are revealed.

This year will see, probably, at least two determined efforts to penetrate those unknown wastes. An English party, under Lieutenant Shackelton, is already encamped at the foot of Mount Erebus, although dissensions in the ranks have seriously interfered with the plans. It is expected that another Charcot expedition will leave France for the Antarctic about the middle of the summer. The scientific world is arousing to the importance of revelations it expects from the daring of a new Columbus.

There is an immense field for Antarctic exploration, and I believe the South Pole can be reached without any very great difficulty. * * * But the pole itself is not the most interesting item. I attach far greater importance to the further investigation of the huge Antarctic continent, about which we know comparatively little at present.

We can only discern the very outlines so far of the new world, the last to be discovered on this globe, but, geographically speaking at least, possessing the same right to be called and considered an independent part of our globe as America or Europe, albeit it is only a world of snow and ice.—Dr. Otto Nordenskjold.

IT IS not the mere glory of discovering the South Pole, therefore, that spurs investigators of Antarctic mysteries—mysteries clutched in an ice-bound continent estimated to be as large as Europe and Australia combined.

For instance, Professor Gaudry, of the French Academie, holds that the discovery of fossils in Patagonia overthrows a number of ideas formerly held regarding the progress of evolution.

"This development," he says, "does not appear to have had the same continuity in the two hemispheres, and it is to further discoveries in the Antarctic that we must look for a solution of that great problem, the origin of life."

From discoveries of Dr. Nordenskjold, the Swede, who found fossil imprints of tropical plants in the Antarctic, it has been concluded that rich and abundant vegetation once existed in the vicinity of the South Pole. Perhaps more thorough search may reveal evidences of an unknown race once flourishing in the clime now inhabited only by seals and penguins.

There are mysterious currents and forces of nature that seem to have their origin in the Antarctic. In the general maritime circulation the southern polar seas play a considerable role. So great, indeed, are these influences that one scientist has said that there may be found the cradle of all the tides in the world.

From the South Pole start the cold currents that go to weaken the warmth of the Gulf Stream in the Atlantic; and in the Pacific, to chill those warm currents, the final offshoots of which die in the frozen circles of the Arctic sea. Here these warm messengers from the lower latitudes eat away the edges of the eternal ice, crumble the glacial mountains into "bergs," which drift away to threaten the mariner in less inhospitable seas.

Apart from their danger to shipping, these icebergs have a great influence on climatic variations. "They are the seed from which grows the cyclone," says Engineer Pleneau. "The South Pole climatically governs the North Pole and all the space between. In no part of the great mass of water which ... ce up two-thirds of the earth's surface are the waves so high as in the Antarctic ocean."

"The terrific gales which exist in various parts of the Antarctic show it to be a sort of 'Throne of the Winds,'" said another authority, "and until the action of such an extremely disturbing area is known, weather forecasters will not have at their command all the necessary facts for foretelling the weather."

Lieutenant Shackelton's English expedition sailed from Cowes last August, and proceeded to the southern ice barrier. There, not long ago, a dispute arose between Lieutenant Shackelton and the sailing master of the vessel, resulting in a physical encounter.

The lieutenant and a party, well provisioned for a long wait, landed and went into camp at the foot of Mount Erebus, while the irate sailing master took the barkentine Nimrod back to New Zealand.

During the summer Lieutenant Shackelton will make whatever exploration is possible, and may even attempt a dash toward the South Pole, while awaiting the return of the Nimrod next fall. The scientific researches he expected to make with the aid of the vessel must await a more propitious opportunity.

Dr. Jean Charcot hopes for better luck with the French expedition. As he has already passed two years in the Antarctic, he expects to benefit by experience. He expects to spend at least two years on the coming expedition.

Great fortitude is required for Antarctic exploration. "In the Arctic regions there is at least some relief from monotony," said a French writer recently. "The changing form of the icebergs provides the landscape with considerable diversity. The ice mountains simulate cities, architectural edifices, whimsical and varied, sometimes depressed, at others sharp-pointed, often pierced with holes like Moorish minarets or the steeples of our churches.

"On these uncertain angles the light falls; it is reflected, refracted and decomposes itself into all the colors of the prism. Here are to be seen rainbows in a perpetual tremble of shaky beauty.

EVERYTHING MONOTONOUS

"At the South Pole, nothing like it. The ice shines with a color just as vivid, but there rainbows are fixed, and the icebergs affect all the same form—large cubes, all alike. Such monotonous surroundings make the tedium, the inactivity of the long polar night most depressing."

Dr. Charcot did not permit inactivity, however. He always found something to do himself and plenty to occupy the time of the others. He arranged for forced tasks, where such obligations did not already exist, and he did not permit any discussion as to their utility.

He watched with especial care the diet of the men that it might ward off scurvy. He had taken along large quantities of preserved vegetables, and he insisted on their being eaten. This was always accompanied with much grumbling on the part of the men, as under the effect of the climate the only call on the stomach is for flesh.

Another severe trial in this line is the necessity of eating the oily flesh of the seal. It is the only form of fresh meat possible, so that, unpleasant as it may be, it must be used.

"As to the tedium," said a Frenchman who described the experiences of the party, "it was real, and weighed heavily on the shoulders of the sailors. Yet as the natural gaiety of the French character must have its field for action, even a temperature of 35 degrees below zero did not prevent enjoyment of its kind.

"Thus great fun was had out of Dr. Charcot delivering an address to a circle of penguins that allowed the strangers not only to visit their domicile, but paid great attention to the speaker.

"Penguins are confiding, pacific and, it may be said, humanitarian birds. They showed a marked degree of joy when the mariners disembarked, and took part, as it were, in many of their rude festivities. Self-contained and earnest, they listened to the music of gramophone placed on the ice with a mute attention not even accorded to our greatest virtuosi.

REWARDED BY BEING EATEN

"And how were these birds rewarded for their many social merits? By proper utilization of their greatest merit. They are eatable."

The penguin is the true owner and symbol of the Antarctic Circle. It thrives there, and is found in great numbers. One of the most interesting discoveries of a former expedition was a huge fossil penguin, indicating that life of a much larger type existed there in bygone ages.

Both the Swedes and the Germans have made scientific investigations in the Antarctic regions. The Swedish expedition was commanded by Dr. Otto Nordenskjold, whose opinion regarding future success is given above. It sailed for the south in October, 1901.

The German expedition went out in the Gauss, which was well equipped for scientific research. This vessel reached the edge of Antarctic ice in February, 1902, and was promptly frozen in.

Sudden and unexpected snowstorms proved the severest obstacle with which the Gauss people had to contend. These made sledge trips exceedingly dangerous; they were often so thick that all landmarks vanished, optical illusions appeared, small hillocks quite close seemed to grow into ice mountains, and all ideas of distance were lost.

At one time a sailor started for the ship from an ice hut only about forty feet distant. He lost his way, and was not found for two hours. All the members of the crew were obliged to join themselves with ropes and search the neighborhood in a wide semicircle.

When such a storm descended upon an exploring expedition there was nothing to do but pitch a tent, make it as comfortable as possible, slip into a sleeping sack and let the fury of the elements rage.

British expeditions have concentrated their efforts, as a rule, upon the route south from New Zealand. Here the largest glacier that is known works out from the overland sea of ice that gathers about the South Pole. It is several hundred miles wide, and has been followed for 300 miles.

Between the open sea and the pole lie something like 750 miles of land ice. Polar travelers have estimated that a small party, landing near the volcano of Erebus, with about a hundred good dogs and sustenance for two years, would have a good chance of reaching the South Pole.

But who will be the Columbus of the icy continent under the Southern Cross?